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Texas Senate nears approval of voter ID bill



Photo: Jay Janner/The Associated Press

Sen. Royce West (left) questions Sen. Troy Fraser during debate on Senate Bill 14, the Voter ID Bill, in the Senate Chamber at the Capitol in Austin on Tuesday.

By **TERRENCE STUTZ**

Published 25 January 2011 05:44 AM

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AUSTIN — Senate [Republicans](#) moved closer Tuesday to passage of a bill that would for the first time require Texans to show a photo ID before voting, while [Democrats](#) tried to build a case to challenge the measure if it becomes law.

Acting just days after Gov. [Rick Perry](#) declared the issue a state emergency, the GOP majority in the Senate gave preliminary approval to voter ID legislation, arguing that elections must be protected against fraud and that most Texans support the idea of verifying every voter's identity.

The 20-12 vote, which included one by Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, was split along partisan lines. Senators will resume debate on the measure today.

"There is considerable national evidence of widespread voter fraud," said Sen. [Troy Fraser](#), R-Horseshoe Bay, author of the bill. "In a close election, even a small amount of fraud could make the margin of difference. Elections are too important to leave unprotected."



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Fraser's bill would require a Texas voter to show a driver's license, state ID card, military ID, passport or citizenship ID to vote. The Republican senator said he would consider adding other photo IDs to the list, such as a concealed handgun license.

In addition, he indicated that supporters of the measure want an exemption for citizens who will be 70 or older by the end of the year. Those voters would continue to fall under existing law, which does not require a photo ID.

Senate Democrats, meanwhile, spent hours Tuesday raising questions about the bill, suggesting it may not be able to win approval from the [U.S. Justice Department](#), which must review all changes to Texas voting laws under the federal Voting Rights Act.

Among their arguments were the lack of evidence of voter identification fraud in Texas and the hardships that the photo ID mandate will impose on lower-income residents, minorities, the elderly and disabled.

"This bill prevents qualified voters from exercising their constitutional rights at the polls in the name of reducing fictional cases of fraud," said Sen. [Wendy Davis](#), D-Fort Worth.

"I'm very afraid we're going to wind up disenfranchising thousands of Texas citizens who are now entitled to vote."

Other Democratic senators pointed to the difficulty many Texans will have if they have to meet the photo requirement by obtaining a state ID card. The card will be furnished for free.

Sen. [Mario Gallegos](#), D-Galena Park, said Dallas has only one [Department of Public Safety](#) office and inner-city Houston — inside the 610 Loop — has no DPS offices. Sen. [Carlos Uresti](#), D-San Antonio, said some constituents in his Senate district running into southwest Texas will have to drive 175 to 200 miles to reach a DPS office to get a state ID.

Republicans discounted the criticisms, saying the proposal is similar to voter ID laws in [Indiana](#) and [Georgia](#) that have been upheld in the federal courts. The Indiana law was affirmed by the [U.S. Supreme Court](#).

"There isn't a single person in Indiana or Georgia who has come forward and said they were disenfranchised by their state's voter ID law," said Sen. [Tommy Williams](#), R-The Woodlands.

"We know there is some inconvenience, but we have done everything we can to make sure that inconvenience is mitigated. People should have to show they are who they say they are when they come to vote."

Democrats were expected to propose several amendments to the bill, including a provision allowing a voter to substitute alternative, non-photo forms of identification.

But Republicans, who hold a 19-12 advantage in the Senate, have indicated they won't accept any type of identification that lacks a photo.

Among the invited witnesses during an all-day hearing on the bill were representatives of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the Texas NAACP, who warned the law was too stringent and would adversely affect minority voters.

"Texas has a long history of voter discrimination against Latinos, and there is the feeling that this is part of a continuing effort to restrict their ability to vote," said Luis Figueroa of [MALDEF](#). "If this is enacted, it would be the most restrictive photo ID requirement for voters in the nation."

On the other hand, the chief legal counsel for the Indiana secretary of state said the voter ID law there has worked well over the past five years.

"Despite the intense scrutiny of the law, in five years and eight statewide elections, there has been scant evidence of disenfranchisement or discrimination of voters," said Jerry Bonnet of the secretary of state's office. "The sun came up after Indiana's voter ID law passed, and the law has become routine."

A voter ID bill passed the Senate in 2009, but the legislation was never voted on in the House, where the chamber was almost evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans. This year, the House is expected to approve the measure thanks to its sizable GOP majority.

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Condor413 Score: -1
4:07 PM on January 26, 2011 Report Abuse
JJB59,
You're dead right. Everyone knows that the lobbyists and unions target their time/money/attention only to the Republicans.

3 replies



JJB59 Score: 3
3:17 PM on January 26, 2011 Report Abuse
And for the proponents of a voter ID, have you asked your representative to provide a detailed list of all the foreign lobbyists that spend their money and time influencing legislation?

Naw....why would you do that?



Carbonfriend Score: -1
3:14 PM on January 26, 2011 Report Abuse
In Harris County back in 2008, nearly 10,000 ACORN-submitted registrations were found to be invalid, including many with clearly fraudulent addresses or other personal information.
No telling how many they didn't catch. Hopefully this legislation will prevent that in the future.

2 replies



Carbonfriend Score: -2
3:09 PM on January 26, 2011 Report Abuse
Excellent....no more acorn-like voter fraud.!!

1 reply



TXMTNMM1 Score: 0
12:50 PM on January 26, 2011 Report Abuse
Do not be so offended by Lopazor's calling it the way it is. You will be living in a hispanic majority state in twenty years.
Payback is going to be "-ell".
Troy Fraser says there is evidence of massive voter fraud nationally, Sounds like a Federal issue. This "evidence", where is it in Texas.

It's funny, these Republicans are the same people who used to tell us " ya know, I read it in the Readers' digest ". I took it with a grain of salt then-----and now.

It is a minority issue. They will be spread across the state voting you down, Republicans.
Thank you Republicans

2 replies



gmksmom Score: 0
12:21 PM on January 26, 2011 Report Abuse
I thought the law required a person to have a valid state drivers license or state issued ID (with photo). If it does, then there isn't a problem for law abiding citizens. The only people that would have a problem with required photo ID are people who operate outside the law.

4 replies



CrazyOne Score: 1
12:19 PM on January 26, 2011 Report Abuse
Why would any legitimate voter object to showing a photo ID at the time he/she votes.
I can't think of any reason why anyone should object????
In today's times, how could anyone NOT have some sort of a photo ID???

3 replies



jillh426 Score: 3
12:15 PM on January 26, 2011 Report Abuse
I question why this is so important that it has to be passed before much more pressing issues????

Whether you like it or not, people WILL be disenfranchised because of a voter ID law. Not everyone has a driver's license. And honestly, if you were someone who did not have a driver's license, would you be willing to stand in line at a DPS office to get an ID so that you can vote????

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 2 replies



JimJ

Score: 3

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9:54 AM on January 26, 2011

I went out to the DPS site and queried by county in southwest Texas for the location of the DPS office. Guess what? DPS has "temporarily" closed a large number of those offices because of an "aging" system. Well, the "aging" system excuse is a LIE. The term "temporary" is a LIE. The DPS is obviously run by those who skim the truth!

Who is going to pay to reopen all those closed DPS offices in the rural counties? Yes, Texas has too many counties, but, if you have a county -- one would expect a DPS presence in the county seat!

This photo-id scheme will never pass Justice Department scrutiny without reopening DPS offices statewide.

Now, why in the world are there no DPS offices in central Houston? Is anyone in this state paying attention to ANYTHING?

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